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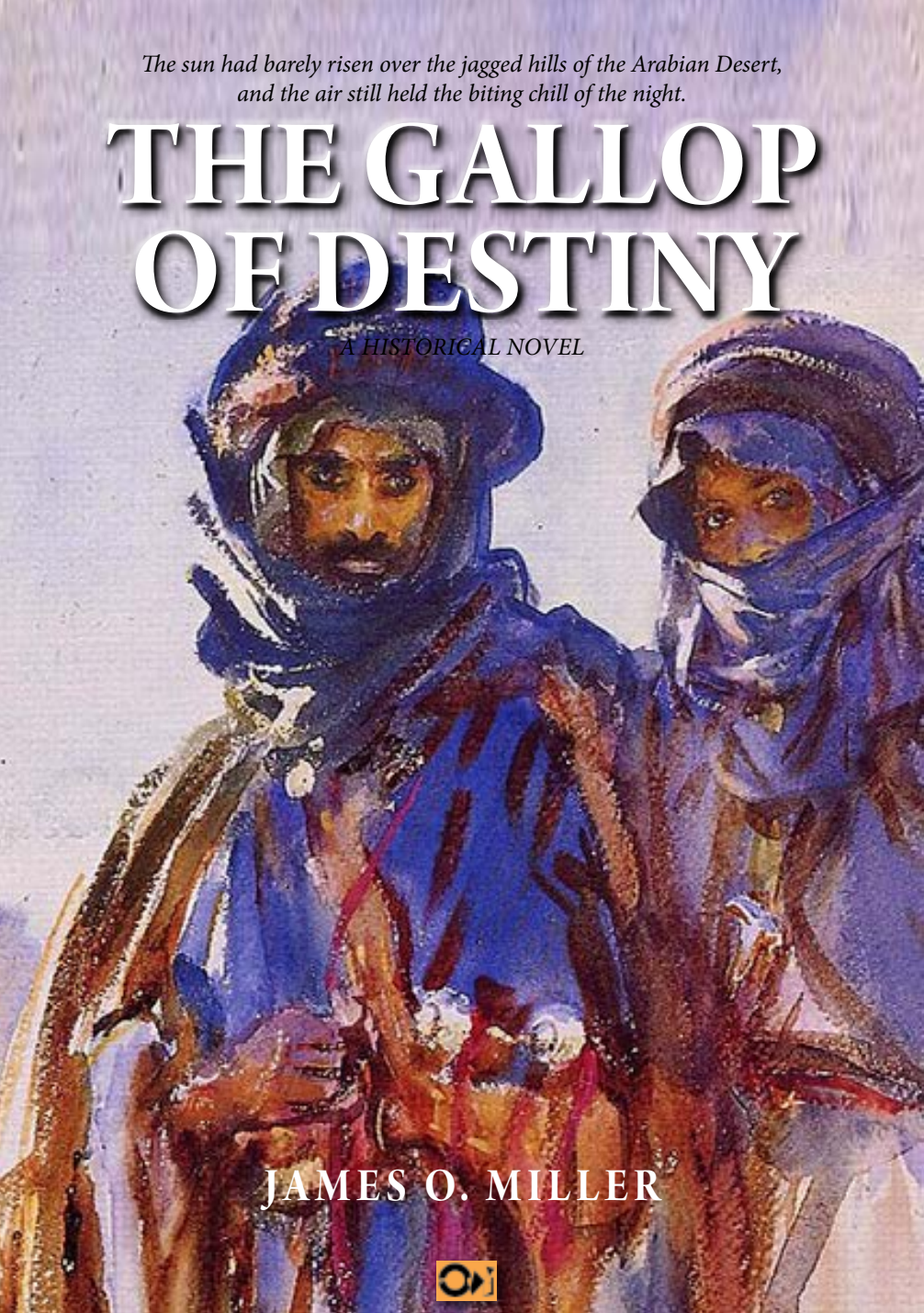
THE GALLOP OF DESTINY

A HISTORICAL NOVEL



JAMES O. MILLER

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James O. Miller

The gallop of destiny

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The sun had barely risen over the jagged hills of the Arabian Desert, and the air still held the biting chill of the night. The vast, unforgiving landscape stretched endlessly, the golden dunes shifting under the weight of time. The desert was a place where silence reigned, where the only sounds were the whispers of wind and the distant call of a hawk. But today, the desert would roar with the thunder of war.

In the distance, a cloud of dust rose into the sky like an omen. The sound of galloping hooves echoed across the plain, each beat of the horses' thunderous pace growing louder by the second. The desert itself seemed to hold its breath.

Captain Jean-Louis Dubois, a French cavalry commander, stood tall in the saddle of his horse, his dark, weathered face set with determination. His crisp uniform, though smudged with the grime of the desert, still bore the insignia of the French army, a symbol of a nation that had sent him here to face an enemy unlike any he had encountered before. The Ottomans. His orders were simple: assist the Bedouin tribes in their revolt against Ottoman oppression, or the French interests in the region would be swallowed whole by their imperial ambitions.

"You sure about this, Captain?" A voice, rough with dust and weariness, came from his left. It was Hassan, the leader of the Bedouin scouts, his eyes sharp as the falcon's talons. His horse was smaller, leaner, faster, just like the man who rode it. Hassan's dark eyes narrowed as he surveyed the horizon. "The Ottomans are no pushovers. You've seen what they can do in Damascus. We may have the desert on our side, but we can't fight their whole army."

"I didn't come here to watch them crush your people," Dubois replied, his voice low but unwavering. His hand tightened around the reins of his horse, the muscles in his arm taut with anticipation. He turned to face the Bedouins, their faces hard as stone beneath

the shrouds of their headscarves. “The Ottomans are many, but they are slow. We are fast. The desert is our ally, and we will use it. I don’t intend to fight a battle we can’t win. But this?” His eyes scanned the horizon once more, catching sight of the faint outlines of Ottoman cavalry moving toward them. “This is a chance to strike first, and make it count.”

Hassan studied him for a moment, his lips curling into a smile that held no humour. “You Frenchmen, you fight like devils,” he said with a flicker of respect. “I’ll follow you, but you lead us to victory or you lead us to our deaths.”

Dubois met his gaze steadily. “Then I’ll lead you to victory.”

A loud, blood-curdling cry split the air. It was the signal. The Bedouins were ready.

“Faster!” Dubois shouted, his voice cutting through the dust storm that had begun to whip up with the growing wind. His horse, a powerful steed that had carried him across battlefields from Paris to the sands of North Africa, reared up, then took off, galloping forward with an almost reckless speed. The desert stretched before him like a vast ocean, and Dubois rode into its heart with no hesitation.

The Bedouins followed in tight formation, their horses kicking up sand in great plumes behind them. The scouts, well-versed in the ways of the desert, moved like shadows, their long rifles already at the ready. Dubois's cavalry, dressed in the faded blue and gold of the French army, formed a line behind them, the horses snorting and stomping in anticipation. They were a formidable force, but it was the Bedouins who had the real advantage: the desert was their home, and they knew it better than any enemy.

Ahead of them, the Ottomans were drawing closer, their cavalry spread out in a loose formation. They were trying to surround them, no doubt hoping to crush the French and their allies in one swift strike. But they had underestimated the desert and Jean-Louis Dubois.

"Ready yourselves!" Dubois barked, his French accent thick with authority. "We strike fast, we strike hard. No mercy."

The Bedouins nodded, their eyes hardening with resolve. They had lived through the cruelty of the Ottoman Empire, had suffered under their boots for far too long. This was their chance to carve out their freedom.

And with Dubois leading them, they would not fail.

The first Ottoman cavalryman fell before he even saw them. A Bedouin scout, as quick as a viper, had taken him down with a well-placed shot from his rifle. The rest of the Bedouins opened fire, their shots ringing out across the desert. Ottoman riders fell one by one, their horses galloping into the windless silence of death.

Dubois raised his sabre high as he and his cavalry crashed into the Ottoman lines, the sound of steel against steel filling the air like a symphony of destruction. The Ottoman soldiers were shocked, unprepared for the speed and ferocity of the attack. But they quickly regained their composure, their sabres drawn, their battle cries echoing across the dunes.

One of the Ottoman commanders, an older man with a battle-hardened face, spurred his horse forward, cutting his way through the chaos. He locked eyes with Dubois, and for a split second, the two men saw in each other a reflection of the same burning desire: survival at any cost.

"French dog!" the Ottoman commander snarled in Arabic, his sword flashing in the sun.

Dubois smirked, not bothering to reply. Instead, he lashed out, his sabre a blur of motion. Their swords clashed with a ringing sound, metal grinding against metal, each strike an explosion of force. Dubois, a seasoned swordsman, fought with the efficiency of a man who had seen the horrors of war up close.

With a quick, brutal twist, he disarmed the Ottoman officer, sending his sword flying into the sand. Before the man could react, Dubois drove his sabre through his chest with a swift, lethal motion.

The battle raged on around him. Men fought and died in the sand, the desert itself turning red as the sun climbed higher. Dubois barely noticed the passing hours, his focus consumed by the fight. He moved like a shadow, his horse as much a part of him as his own limbs, weaving in and out of the chaos with deadly precision.

It wasn't long before the Ottoman forces began to break, their once-solid lines crumbling under the weight of the relentless attack. The Bedouins pressed on, forcing the Ottomans into retreat, their rifles and sabres cutting through the fleeing soldiers with deadly efficiency.

The battle was over in a matter of minutes but the

victory was hard-won. Dubois surveyed the battlefield, his heart still racing with adrenaline. Bodies littered the sand—both Ottoman and Bedouin, side by side. The cost of war was steep, but they had won. And with this victory, they had struck a blow that would echo through the desert.

As Dubois dismounted, his boots crunching in the sand, Hassan rode up beside him, a look of grim satisfaction on his face. "You led us well, Captain. The Ottomans will not forget this."

Dubois wiped the blood from his sabre and nodded. "This is just the beginning. There's more to come, and we'll need to move quickly. We've drawn their attention now."

Hassan's eyes gleamed with determination. "Then we strike again. And again. Until they break."

Dubois glanced out at the horizon, where the Ottoman reinforcements would soon arrive. He knew this fight was far from over. But for the first time since he'd set foot in the desert, he felt something he hadn't in a long time, a glimmer of hope.

The Gallop of Destiny had only just begun.

The alliance of steel and sand

The sun hung low in the sky, casting an eerie, golden light over the endless stretch of desert. The air shimmered with heat, the horizon a wavy line of illusion. Beneath the relentless sun, the Ottoman forces advanced in a slow, methodical march, their massive columns of infantry and cavalry moving in tight formations. There was no panic in their ranks, no disarray, just the quiet, disciplined march of men who believed they had nothing to fear.

What the Ottomans didn't see was the storm about to hit them from the desert's heart.

Captain Jean-Louis Dubois, a man as much a part of the desert as the shifting sands, watched through a pair of binoculars from the craggy hills that overlooked the valley below. His fingers tightened around

the leather strap of his rifle, the desert wind tousling his dark hair. His dark brown eyes narrowed as he studied the enemy. The Ottomans were making their move, no doubt they thought they could sweep through the desert, annihilate the scattered Bedouin tribes and extend their grip over the region.

But Dubois had spent years in this unforgiving place. He knew the desert, and he knew its people. And the Ottomans ...well, they were about to learn just how wrong they were.

Beside him, Hassan, the grim leader of the Bedouin scouts, crouched low, his eyes scanning the horizon. His dark face was a mask of concentration.

"Everything is in place, Captain," Hassan murmured, his voice like sand slipping through an hourglass. "We strike when you say the word."

Dubois nodded, his gaze flicking to the shadowy figures of the Bedouins, lying in wait behind rocks and dunes. They were quick and silent, like phantoms in the night. The French cavalrymen, meanwhile, were positioned slightly behind them, ready to charge at a moment's notice. Dubois had trained them well. The sand was their ally, their weapons extensions of their very will.

It had taken months to gain Hassan's trust, months of small victories and hard-fought skirmishes, but now, finally, the alliance was complete. The Bedouins, hungry for revenge, had pledged their loyalty to the French captain. Together, they were a force that no one could underestimate.

A sharp crack of rifle fire cut through the air, echoing off the distant rocks. It was the signal.

The Bedouins fired in unison, the sudden noise ripping through the stillness like a thunderclap. The first Ottoman cavalryman fell, his horse rearing wildly before crashing to the ground. Another shot rang out, another Ottoman rider dropped. The Bedouins were like ghosts, their movements swift and deadly, their rifles precise.

The Ottoman cavalry, startled by the sudden onslaught, scrambled to form defensive lines. But they were too slow.

Dubois raised his sabre high, his voice carrying over the din of battle. "To me, men! For France and for freedom!"

With that, the French cavalry surged forward, their horses thundering across the sand, charging toward

the Ottoman lines with a ferocity born of desperation and hunger for victory. The Ottoman cavalry, already in disarray, tried to regroup, but they were too scattered, too vulnerable.

Dubois's heart pounded as he rode at the head of his men, the wind whipping through his hair. He spotted the Ottoman commander, an older officer in a dark blue uniform, riding at the front of his men. His sabre was raised, his expression filled with determination. But it would do him no good.

Dubois spurred his horse forward, his eyes locked on the Ottoman commander. As he closed the distance, his sabre flashed in the afternoon sun, and with a loud battle cry, he swung the blade with all his might.

The Ottoman officer parried the blow, but the force of Dubois's strike knocked his sword from his hand. Dubois pressed the advantage, his sabre a blur of motion, slicing down in a devastating arc. The Ottoman officer's defence crumbled under the weight of the French captain's assault. Before the officer could react, Dubois's blade found its mark, cutting deep into the Ottoman commander's side. The man let out a strangled cry, his horse veering off course as he fell to the sand.

The battle around them erupted into chaos. Ottoman soldiers, thrown off balance by the sudden attack, struggled to maintain their formation. The Bedouins, still perched on the dunes, continued to fire with deadly accuracy, each shot taking down another Ottoman soldier. The French cavalry pressed on, riding down the enemy with ruthless efficiency.

"Hold the line!" Dubois shouted, rallying his men. "Drive them back!"

The French cavalrymen fought with precision, cutting through the Ottoman ranks with the cold, calculated brutality of men who had been trained for moments like this. Every swing of their sabres, every shot from their pistols, was a carefully calculated move. There was no room for hesitation in this fight.

One Ottoman officer, desperate to regain control of the battlefield, spurred his horse forward, leading a charge directly into the French cavalry. Dubois met him head-on. The two men's sabres clashed with a resounding crack. The Ottoman officer, a hulking brute of a man, was no slouch with a blade, but Dubois was faster. With a flick of his wrist, he disarmed the officer, sending the Ottoman's sword flying into the sand. Before the man could recover, Dubois's sa-

bre cut across his chest, sending him crashing to the ground.

Dubois didn't pause to watch the man fall. He turned his attention to the battlefield, his eyes scanning for new threats. The Ottomans were breaking. Their formation was collapsing.

"Fall back to the hills!" Dubois shouted. "We need to control the high ground!"

Hassan's voice rang out behind him. "The hills are ours, Frenchman. Move quickly."

The Bedouins moved with the speed and agility of desert predators, disappearing into the dunes, leaving only the faintest traces of their passage behind. Dubois's cavalry followed close behind, urging their horses forward at a gallop. As they rode, the cries of dying men echoed in the air, but Dubois didn't let the sounds affect him. His focus remained sharp.

They reached the hills in a matter of minutes, just as the Ottoman reinforcements arrived. The sight of the fresh wave of Ottoman soldiers gave Dubois pause, but he didn't flinch. He knew the reinforcements would be just as ill-prepared as the first wave. The key was to maintain the momentum, to keep

them off balance, to strike when they least expected it.

Dubois turned to his men. “Get into position. We hold this ground. No matter what.”

Hassan appeared beside him, his eyes gleaming with a mixture of pride and ferocity. “You’ve led us well, Frenchman. The Ottomans won’t be back in force for days.”

Dubois nodded. “We’ll make sure of that.”

The battle was not over, but the Ottomans had been dealt a significant blow. The desert was theirs for the taking, for now. As the sun sank lower in the sky, casting long shadows over the battlefield, Dubois allowed himself a brief moment of satisfaction. They had struck first, and they had struck hard.

But the Ottomans would return, and when they did, Dubois would be ready. For the alliance of steel and sand had only just begun its campaign.

Betrayal in the desert

The crackle of the campfire was the only sound in the heavy desert night, but even its warmth seemed futile against the chill that had begun to creep over the landscape. The air was thick with tension, thick with the dust of battle that had settled into every crevice of the desert floor. The men of the French cavalry sat in silence, their faces half-lit by the flames, eyes steely and watchful, each of them keenly aware that the next hours could mean life or death.

Jean-Louis Dubois, his mind focused and sharp, glanced across the fire at Sheikh Raed, who sat motionless, his dark eyes fixed on the fire's glow. The Sheikh's weathered face was a picture of unreadable stoicism, a mask forged by years of hardship in the unforgiving desert. Despite their victory, there was something unsettling in the air, a foreboding that gnawed at Dubois's gut.

"You have proven yourself a worthy ally, Jean-Louis," Raed said, his voice as gravelly as the winds that swept across the barren land. He leaned forward slightly, a hint of admiration in his gaze. "But there are many who do not trust the French."

Dubois nodded, his eyes never leaving the Sheikh's. "I know," he replied, his voice steady but laced with the tension of their shared predicament. "But the Ottomans do not care for your tribes. They will crush you if we do not stand together."

Raed's lips twisted into a grim line, but his eyes darkened with a fleeting shadow of doubt. "Some of my people see your presence as a foreign invasion. They believe you will take from us as the Ottomans have." He paused, looking away for a moment, as if seeing something beyond the fire. "Your presence here, it is a gamble, Frenchman."

Jean-Louis allowed himself a moment's silence, his thoughts racing as the flames danced before him. The stakes were higher now than they had ever been. Raed had brought his people to the fight against the Ottomans, but the alliance was fragile, teetering on the edge of distrust. The Bedouins were a proud people, fiercely protective of their land and traditions,

and to them, the French were just another imperial power, another foreign army with its own ambitions. Dubois knew that if the relationship between them soured, their alliance would fall apart, and the Ottomans would steamroll over them both.

Before he could respond, a figure appeared at the edge of the camp. He was a shadow against the night, moving swiftly toward them, his breathing ragged, his clothes caked with dust. The messenger's eyes were wide with fear, his expression one of urgency.

"Sheikh Raed," the man said, his voice trembling as he bowed his head, "they have come. Ottoman reinforcements, hundreds of them. They are marching on your camp."

Raed stood in one fluid motion, his face hardening. His hand hovered over the hilt of his scimitar, the grip tightening slightly. "How long until they arrive?" he demanded, his voice low and steady, the leader's command cutting through the tension like a blade.

The messenger took a ragged breath, his face pale under the desert moon. "By morning," he gasped. "They are already on the move."

Dubois cursed under his breath. His jaw clenched as the gravity of the situation settled in. The time for subtlety was over. The odds had shifted in favour of the Ottomans, and they couldn't afford to wait. They had to strike first.

"We must leave now," Dubois said, his voice sharp, his mind already working through the options. "We can't fight them all head-on. We'll have to use the terrain to our advantage. We can't risk another head-to-head battle, not with their numbers."

Raed turned to the Bedouin scouts nearby, giving them a silent command. They moved without hesitation, vanishing into the night like ghosts, ready to carry out their orders.

Raed turned back to Dubois, his gaze unwavering. "I will give the order. But be warned, Frenchman," he said, his tone darkening. "There are some among my tribe who will not fight with you. If it comes to it, you may find yourself alone."

Dubois didn't flinch. "Then we fight alone. But we fight, and we win." His voice carried the weight of a promise. The conviction in his words was absolute. He had come too far, and the desert was a battlefield

where the strong survived, and the weak were left behind.

The Sheikh studied him for a long moment, then nodded, a flicker of respect passing through his eyes. Without another word, he turned to address his men, his voice rising in a steady chant of orders. “We move at once. Prepare yourselves.”

The fire flickered, casting long shadows over the camp as the Bedouins moved into action, packing their belongings with practiced efficiency. The French soldiers, too, readied themselves, their faces grim as they checked weapons and tightened the straps of their gear. The cavalry horses, restless and sensing the tension, stomped in the sand, their nostrils flaring.

In the distance, the sounds of the desert, an owl’s call, the rustle of the wind, seemed to take on a darker tone. The calm before the storm. The Ottomans were coming, and every second they wasted now was a second they couldn’t afford.

As they began to move under the cover of darkness, the soft crunch of sand beneath boots was the only sound that accompanied them. Dubois led the

way, his mind calculating their path. He knew the terrain well, knew where the hills and canyons could offer shelter and where the open plains would expose them to attack. The Bedouins, familiar with the land's secrets, moved like shadows at his side, a seamless blend of man and desert.

A sudden sharp shout echoed from the rear. A scout, a young Bedouin, barely more than a boy—came racing forward, his face streaked with dust. "They're coming faster than we thought!" the scout panted. "A column of them, two miles out!"

Raed cursed in his native tongue, his face betraying a flicker of concern. "The reinforcements have arrived early. They are faster than we anticipated."

Dubois didn't hesitate. "We have no time to waste. We'll set up an ambush in the gorge ahead. They'll never expect it."

Raed looked at him, a hint of uncertainty creeping into his eyes. "We can't risk splitting our forces."

"We won't," Dubois replied, his voice sharp as a whip. "We'll draw them in, force them to follow us into the narrowest part of the gorge. The terrain will give us the upper hand."

Raed nodded slowly, though the doubt remained in his eyes. “And if they don’t follow?”

Dubois’s gaze hardened. “Then we’ll make them follow.”

The group moved swiftly, slipping through the darkness like specters. The gorge lay ahead, a deep scar in the earth that would funnel the Ottomans into a trap. If they were quick, they could make it there in time to set up their defence.

The sound of distant hoofbeats grew louder, the clatter of Ottoman cavalry reaching their ears. They were close.

As they reached the gorge, Dubois signalled the French cavalry to move into position behind the rocks, hiding in the shadows. The Bedouins scattered, taking up positions along the ridges, ready to pounce. The tension in the air was palpable, like the moment before a predator strikes.

The first Ottoman column appeared on the horizon, a dark mass of soldiers, their torches flickering like fireflies in the night. Dubois held his breath, waiting. A heartbeat, two, then, he raised his hand.

“Now!”

The ambush erupted into chaos. Rifle shots rang out from the Bedouins on the ridges, cutting down the first wave of soldiers. The French cavalry rode forward in a blur, sabres flashing under the moonlight as they cut through the surprised Ottomans. The night air was filled with the sound of battle, swords clashing, screams of pain, the thunderous roar of hooves. The Ottomans were caught off guard, their formation shattered in seconds.

But in the midst of the chaos, something was wrong. Dubois felt it before he saw it, a movement from the rear. A shadow flitted across the rocks. It was too late to stop it. Betrayal had found its way into the camp.

A gunshot rang out.

Jean-Louis spun around just in time to see the Bedouin scout, a young man he had trusted, aiming a rifle at him, the weapon trained steady on his chest.

And then the world exploded into chaos.

The battle of the dunes

The night was far too still. The air hung heavy, thick with the scent of sand and tension. Jean-Louis Dubois sat astride his steed, eyes narrowed against the harsh desert wind, scanning the horizon for any sign of movement. His cavalry had spread out in the shadow of the dunes, their horses' forms barely visible in the predawn dark, the only sound the occasional snort from an impatient animal or the faint scraping of a saddle creak.

It had been a long, agonizing wait, one punctuated only by the thumping of his heart, which seemed far too loud in the otherwise silent desert. The men were ready, but the time had yet to come. They were well-positioned now, ready to spring the trap they had set for the Ottoman reinforcements. But even

as his fingers tightened around the hilt of his sabre, Dubois knew the truth, nothing in the desert was ever as it seemed. The sun hadn't yet risen, and already the dunes felt like a tomb waiting to be filled.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the figure of Raed on his camel, perched high like some desert king, his silhouette carved sharply against the stillness. The Sheikh's eyes, dark and fathomless, remained fixed on the horizon.

"We wait," Raed said simply, his voice a low rumble carried on the wind. "The storm comes with the light."

Dubois nodded without speaking, his eyes never leaving the shifting sands ahead of them. The moment the sun breached the dunes, everything would change.

The silence was broken by the first low, distant rumble. Dubois's pulse quickened as he straightened in the saddle, trying to pierce the darkness with his eyes. In the distance, movement began to form, silhouettes of Ottoman soldiers marching, their horses' hooves barely audible against the expanse of sand.

"They're here," Dubois muttered under his breath,

a quick breath escaping his lips. He turned to his men, each of them poised with weapons in hand. “Get ready,” he commanded sharply.

The sound of the Ottoman force grew louder as the minutes passed. With every step they took, the storm was coming closer, their fate tied to the will of the cavalry and the Bedouins. Dubois could feel the hairs on the back of his neck rise. He reached for the reins, his grip tight, waiting for the signal.

A flare of red against the rising sun, a signal.

“Charge!” Dubois shouted, his voice cutting through the morning air. The French cavalry burst from the dunes like a storm unleashed, hooves pounding the sand in an unstoppable rhythm, a force of nature. The Bedouins had already begun their fire, sharp rifle shots tearing through the air, striking down Ottoman soldiers before they could even react.

It was chaos. The French cavalry struck hard, sabres flashing in the rising light, cutting down the Ottomans with the brutal precision that only soldiers trained in battle could muster. The sound of steel against steel echoed in the air, the desert alive with violence.

Dubois found himself at the heart of the maelstrom. The force of the charge had left the Ottoman frontlines scattered, but more were coming, more than expected. He was in the thick of it now, sabre swinging through the air in a deadly arc as he cut down a dozen Ottoman soldiers in a blur of motion. Blood stained the sand as bodies hit the ground.

A young Ottoman officer tried to raise a scimitar in defence, but Dubois was faster. The blade sliced through the air, and in the next heartbeat, the officer was on the ground, his weapon useless at his side.

Dubois's breath came in ragged gasps as he rode through the battle, cutting down soldier after soldier. His men fought valiantly alongside him, their discipline honed by years of training in the cavalry. Yet, for all the chaos, Dubois's mind kept returning to one thought ...Raed.

The Sheikh's Bedouins were formidable, no doubt, but they were outnumbered. The French cavalry could hold the Ottomans back for a while, but the odds were stacked heavily against them. He needed Raed's men to push harder, to press the advantage.

"Raed!" Dubois shouted as he cut down anoth-

er Ottoman soldier, his blade dripping with blood. “Where are you?”

But the Sheikh was nowhere to be found. The Bedouins, despite their skill with rifles, were scattered. Some were riding hard, engaging the Ottomans in small skirmishes, while others had vanished into the dunes, as if waiting for a signal to strike. The cavalry was in full charge, pushing the Ottomans back, but the lack of coordination was starting to cost them.

“Raed!” Dubois shouted again, his frustration rising, but there was no answer.

The sounds of battle, screams, the clash of swords, the rhythmic thumping of hooves, began to drown out all other thoughts. Dubois’s attention snapped to the rear as the unmistakable sound of reinforcements reached his ears.

Another Ottoman column, larger this time, had arrived. They had been waiting, circling behind the first group, anticipating the French move. And now, they had come from the rear, catching the cavalry unprepared.

“Fall back!” Dubois barked, but it was already too late.

The fresh Ottoman forces began to surge forward, flanking the French cavalry and cutting off their escape route. The ground trembled as the new wave of soldiers, reinforced with artillery and cavalry, bore down upon them.

In the confusion, Dubois could see the waves of Ottoman cavalry surging around him, their lances and sabres raised high. He raised his own sabre to parry an incoming blow, the force of it vibrating through his arm.

But something was wrong. His soldiers, while fighting fiercely, were being pushed back. The ambush they had prepared for so long had turned against them.

"Raed!" Dubois shouted, desperation creeping into his voice. "We need you now!"

Suddenly, a piercing scream rang out from the dunes, a Bedouin scout appeared from the smoke, his horse racing toward Dubois, his eyes wide with panic.

"The traitors," the scout panted, blood dripping from his arm. "Raed... he's..."

Before the scout could finish his sentence, a bullet tore through the air, striking him down. He crumpled to the sand, lifeless.

Dubois's heart stopped. No. It couldn't be.

His worst fears were confirmed when the Sheikh himself appeared from the smoke, but he was not alone. Several of his men, once allies, now rode at his side, traitors to their own people. Raed's face was a mask of fury, his eyes blazing with something darker than Dubois had ever seen.

"You fool," Raed's voice rang out above the battle, cold and filled with venom. "You thought you could control me. You thought you could control the desert. But you were wrong."

A split-second of confusion passed before the full weight of the betrayal hit Dubois. The Bedouins, Raed's own men, had turned. They had sided with the Ottomans.

The chaos of the battle seemed to freeze in that moment. The French cavalry were trapped, surrounded on all sides by Ottoman soldiers and now the Bedouins who had once fought beside them.

"Raed, you've made a terrible mistake," Dubois said, his voice low, almost pleading. "This... this is not the way. You can still turn back."

But Raed's face was implacable. "There is no turning back, Frenchman. Not now."

Dubois felt his pulse quicken, and his sabre in his hand felt heavier. The battle had become a war for survival, and it was clear now that not all would make it out alive.

The clash of steel, the thundering hooves, the cries of the wounded, it was no longer a battle for victory. It was a fight for escape.

"To the dunes!" Dubois barked, pulling his horse hard to the left, steering his men toward the only route they might still use. "Fall back to the dunes! Make for the rocks!"

But the Ottoman forces, bolstered by the traitorous Bedouins, closed in, their pincer tightening, the net drawing around them.

The French cavalry fought with everything they had, but the enemy was too many, and the desert seemed to close in around them. With every passing

moment, the sands seemed to swallow their chances for survival.

And somewhere, amidst the madness of the desert, Dubois realized the grim truth. Not all battles could be won.

Last stand in the sand

The desert was a furnace, the heat oppressive and unforgiving. By the time the sun reached its zenith, Dubois and the remaining Bedouins were a scattered remnant of the force that had once charged so boldly across the dunes. Their horses were spent, the animals gasping for air, their coats slick with sweat, and their riders, no less weary, were stained with the dust of battle. Blood, both Ottoman and French, mixed with the sand beneath their boots. It was a scene of carnage, a battlefield whose dust would settle only to reveal the dead and the dying.

Dubois rode at the head of the remaining few, his sword slick with blood, eyes sharp despite the exhaustion pulling at his limbs. His shirt clung to his body, soaked with perspiration and his own blood from where a bullet had grazed his side. The steady thrum of his heartbeat was a painful reminder of how close they were to the end.

The sound of the Ottoman forces closing in echoed through the stillness of the desert, relentless like the tide rising on a beach, impossible to outrun. From his vantage point atop his horse, Dubois could see them, dozens of Ottoman soldiers, their red fezzes like angry spots in the distance, their horses kicking up sand as they advanced. The Bedouins, tired but fierce, moved with the determination of men who had nothing left to lose.

"We cannot fight them all," Dubois muttered to himself, his voice hoarse from days of dust and shouting. His words were drowned out by the clamour of the approaching enemy.

One of his men, Tariq, rode up beside him, the young Bedouin's face a grim mask of resolve. Tariq had fought valiantly, and his loyalty to Dubois was unwavering. His horse danced nervously beneath him, but his eyes remained fixed on Dubois, a glint of steel in them.

"We will not die today, Captain," Tariq said, his voice steady despite the fear pressing at the back of his words. "We fight until the last."

Dubois looked over at the young man. The fierce loyalty in Tariq's eyes was a balm to his tired soul. But

deep down, Dubois knew the truth. The battle was lost. Their forces were outnumbered, outflanked, and surrounded. Raed's betrayal had sealed their fate.

"You are brave, Tariq," Dubois said softly, "but bravery alone will not save us."

Tariq's jaw tightened, his hand resting on the hilt of his scimitar. "We fight, Captain. For the desert, for the tribes, and for the freedom we promised."

Dubois's lips curled into a thin, grim smile. "Then we fight, Tariq. We fight, not for victory but for honour."

The weight of those words settled heavily on Dubois's chest. His thoughts flickered briefly to the home he would never see again, to the people he had sworn to protect. He looked to the horizon, empty. The distant hope of reinforcements, once a glimmer in his chest, seemed to vanish with the cruel wind.

But there was no turning back now. The sand beneath his feet was both his foundation and his tomb. The Bedouins were with him. The cavalry, few in number but fierce in spirit, were ready to meet the enemy head-on, even if it meant their last breath.

Dubois raised his sword high, rallying the men around him. “For France, for the tribes, for freedom!”

With that, they charged, wild, desperate and determined. The horses thundered across the sand, kicking up clouds of dust as the French cavalry and the remaining Bedouins tore into the Ottoman ranks. Swords flashed in the harsh sunlight, sabres cutting through the air with deadly precision. Tariq was a blur of motion, his scimitar flashing as he cut down one Ottoman soldier after another, his face a mask of bloodlust.

But for all their fury, the weight of numbers was against them. The Ottomans were relentless. More waves poured in from every direction. Their rifles cracked in the air, the sharp report of gunfire mingling with the screams of men in battle. The air was thick with the stench of sweat, blood, and gunpowder.

Dubois fought with the fury of a man who knew his death was near. His sabre lashed out with practiced precision, striking down an Ottoman officer who thought himself safe behind his men. But even as he cut down one soldier, another appeared, a dozen more behind him. The desert, once so vast and empty, was now a writhing mass of bodies and clashing steel.

A roar of pain pierced the air as Tariq's horse was struck down, throwing the young Bedouin to the ground. He rolled to his feet in a fluid motion, his scimitar slashing through the air as he continued the fight, undeterred.

Dubois gritted his teeth as he saw Tariq, surrounded by Ottoman soldiers, fighting with everything he had. There was no stopping them now. The end was upon them.

"Stay close!" Dubois shouted, rallying his men around him, but even as the words left his mouth, the truth settled like a stone in his gut: there would be no retreat, no escape.

Suddenly, the air was split by a high-pitched scream, and Dubois turned to see a Bedouin, his arms flailing, tossed from his horse. The Ottoman soldiers pounced, dragging him to the ground, and the fight became a blur. It was no longer about strategy, it was about survival. A series of explosions went off to his left, the sound deafening. Dubois saw a flash of light, a column of smoke rising from the desert floor as a French artillery shell found its mark, too late, too little.

"We need to move!" one of his men screamed, his voice swallowed by the chaos.

Dubois's heart pounded in his chest, and for a moment, the desert seemed to stand still. He looked around, his men were fighting valiantly, but they were losing ground. The Ottomans were closing in, their forces far superior in number and Raed's betrayal had cut them off from any hope of reinforcements.

Tariq was the first to charge again, his face twisted in fury, and the others followed. There was no turning back now.

But even as Dubois and his men fought with every ounce of strength left, the tide of battle was slipping away. Dubois could feel the weight of his sword growing heavier with each strike. His vision blurred. His breath came in shallow gasps. And yet, amidst it all, he couldn't help but feel a strange sense of peace.

The charge had been their last. The French cavalry had fought bravely, but the desert had taken its toll. Dubois could hear the faint sound of hooves in the distance, but it was too late. French reinforcements were still too far away.

And then, just as the last of his strength was spent, a voice rang out, clear, commanding.

"Hold on, Captain."

It was Tariq's voice. Dubois turned, his heart skipping a beat. Through the smoke, through the carnage, a line of French soldiers, reinforcements, appeared over the crest of a dune, their uniforms bright against the horizon. Dubois's pulse surged as he recognized the unmistakable insignia of the French Foreign Legion.

"Victory is still ours," Dubois whispered, his grip tightening on his sabre.

But as the reinforcements rushed toward him, his vision began to fade. His body, broken and battered, finally gave in. He fell from his horse, the world around him spinning as the desert claimed him.

And in that moment, as the last of his breath escaped his lips, he knew, though the battle was lost, the war was not over. The fight for the desert, for the tribes, and for the freedom they had sworn to protect, would continue.

For Dubois, the sands had claimed him. But his legacy would live on.

THE END

The gallop of destiny

James O. Miller

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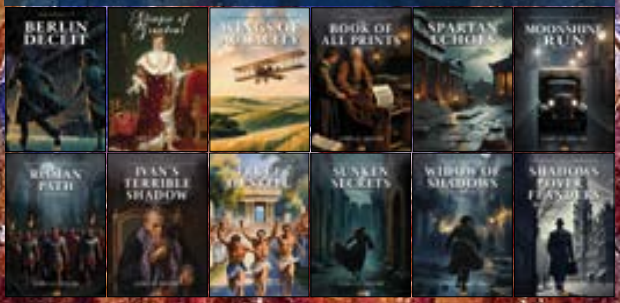
The sun had barely risen over the jagged hills of the Arabian Desert, and the air still held the biting chill of the night.

THE GALLOP OF DESTINY

A HISTORICAL NOVEL

James O. Miller. After 23 years of high school teaching history and four years teaching in Germany retirement didn't come well especially since I hate gardening and golf. So I decided to exercise my imagination combined with my academic knowledge.



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